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May 22, 2003

Aibo sees all



To celebrate the fourth anniversary of its robot Aibo dogs, Sony is introducing a neat new feature: "Aibo Eyes". From **their press release** ...

With AIBO EYES software, the four-legged robot can now be controlled remotely via e-mail commands. Users can send an e-mail message to the robot and receive a JPEG image with their computer or other mobile communication device, capturing a picture of what AIBO sees allowing them, for example, to view their home or children while away.

In addition, AIBO EYES software will allow family and friends to communicate through audio messages. For instance, AIBO owners can now send a message command from a remote device, such as a PC or mobile communication device, to AIBO and have the robot deliver a pre-recorded message aloud such as congratulations! Further, AIBO EYES will also enable owners to remotely e-mail message commands to AIBO and have the robot perform selected songs, such as When the Saints Come Marching In and Ode to Joy.

I've always been totally charmed by the idea of "telepresence" -- using robots as a proxy when we're away. A few years back, I interviewed someone from **irobot**, the Boston-based robot making company. We were talking about their original (and now discontinued) irobot, which was a robot they were hoping to sell to corporations. It looked sort of like a eight-wheeled hoover vacuum with an eyestalk, and included a camera, speakers, and a microphone. A company could buy one and leave it at the head office. If an executive couldn't make it into the office for a meeting, she or he could "robot in" -- they would go a web site where they could take control of the robot and move it around the office, seeing what it sees, hearing what it hears, and talking to people. (A Wired reporter **tried it out and described the experience here.**)

It seemed pretty funny to think of a robot wandering into a meeting and announcing that it's actually Jeff from accounts receivable, who's going to be there via telepresence. Then I imagined an even better scenario: Say your company has a dozen of these, traffic is really bad one day, and *everyone* shows up to the meeting remotely as a robot; the room is filled with twelve robots in a circle, all discussing their quarterly sales projections.

When I temporarily relocated to MIT last year, I thought about getting a telepresence

robot to leave at my girlfriend Emily's place in New York. I discussed the idea with a friend who studies webcamming and online culture. "With the robot, I could sort of wander around her apartment while I'm in Boston, say hi, and see what's going on," I enthused.

"Dude," she said. "That's not telepresence. That's *stalking*."

Posted by Clive Thompson at May 22, 2003 10:32 PM | [TrackBack](#)

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